

INDIAN MEDIA: FEEDING THE WAR HYSTERIA OR A PEACE DIVIDEND?

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Abstract

Agenda setting through discursive practices remains a dominant practice in Post-Truth era. The media in this regard is playing a pivotal role at full spectrum. The media reporting of conflicts through phraseology has heightened the impact of media on popular perception building. It is debatable now to establish if any state's foreign policy is driven by its officials or by the media content. In the light of content framing, this article explains the Indian media's pessimistic role in shaping the public opinion in an anticipated direction by its focus on calculated and sustained approach. Overall, Indian media while setting the agenda in favor of coercive and aggressive posturing of Indian government vis-à-vis Pakistan, has forgotten the essence of Peace Journalism. Such conduct has paved ways to feed war hysteria by manipulated conflict reporting against Pakistan. The articulation of conflict prone discourse by Indian media will be explained under the theoretical contours of CNN Effect theory.

Keywords: Agenda Setting, Content Framing, Phraseology, Peace Journalism, War Journalism, War Jingoism, War Hysteria.

Introduction

Digitisation is the most important contemporary trend in modern politics. The way content and the information is consumed, has been overwhelmingly altered. In this age of information, getting the pertinent message at the appropriate time, delivered to the relevant person, in the right place, is nothing less than the holy grail. Media of any communication strategy is a domineering element that helps political elite, policy makers and social influencers to converse with their audience convincingly. Mass means of communication are policy instrument since ages.¹ The media is supposed to grasp a leading position to assemble and circulate information, henceforth with professionalism and essential responsibility.² The value and significance of objectivity has long disappeared from the modern media outlets and become a subjective phenomenon. The main objective of contemporary media broadcast is to enhance ratings and viewership while disregarding the extent to which the content is dubious and controversial. Phraseology and content framing by Indian media have influenced public opinion as well

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as imagination. Article Nineteen (19) of the Indian constitution ensures freedom of speech and expression as one of the six freedoms.³ The antagonistic role of Indian media in narrative building and molding public opinion against Pakistan has not only violated the above mentioned article but has also let down the status of its constitution.

This research study highlights the potential role of Indian media in conflict reporting against Pakistan in order to set agenda for the government. Gradually, Indian media has reduced the space for pro peace voices leading to almost non-existence of peace constituency. The study brings into the limelight Indian media's tilt towards war journalism by highlighting the major events that happened between Pakistan and India. The discourse that has been constructed about Pakistan by the Indian leaders' discursive practices and Indian Media's perception building in favour of war has also been discussed.

Theoretical Perspective

States, sometimes, while utilizing media as an ally and using it for narrative building, project narratives which portray the state policies as hostage and antagonistic, commonly known as CNN Effect. In relation to the connotation that these words 'CNN' and 'Effect' carry after being assembled together, Robinson states that, "the phrase has become a broad term for the abilities of real-time communications technology to aggravate the major retorts from the political elite and domestic audiences to both national and global events, via the news media."⁴

Steven Livingston, the main proponent of CNN Effect theory ascertains three possible manifestations that can surface or reinforce from the CNN Effect. "They are, 1) a policy agenda-setting instrument, 2) an impediment in achieving the desired policy goals, 3) an accelerant to decision making policy. Each corresponds to the different stages of the notion of a linear policy process."⁵ These dimensions are intertwined intrinsically with the notions of the immediacy of information exchange, public opinion, the recognition of events on behalf of policy-makers and the exposure of sensitive information.⁶

The CNN Effect theory illustrates that the 24 hours news coverage like CNN has influence and effect on the political and economic outlook of the general public. Media outlets as medium of providing information on a particular event and subject, help the media to potentially grab the attention of general masses for a certain period of time. CNN Effect views that timely coverage and breaking news of an event prompts stronger response by the target audience. CNN Effect helps to create overreaction from the masses in the market or a state in general, but in another way it also helps the markets / state interest in the like manner. CNN Effect provokes individuals to respond more aggressively towards the subject, which is placed under consideration. It also gives

importance to time and space under which an information is broadcast and how a particular news or event would affect and matter to a common individual.⁷

While employing CNN Effect theory on the present situation of Indian media it has been observed that Indian media, by narrating Pulwama incident and abrogation of Article 370 and 35A has created war hysteria against Pakistan. Spewing venom against Pakistan projecting it as Frankenstein Monster is a continuous job of the Indian media. A humungous number of reports and talk shows are held in this particular time period and their basic notion to prepare Indian public in favour of war. Indian media is continuously using the jingoistic jargon and propelling the common masses towards war against Pakistan. Indian media as per the theory is working as accelerant by acting as a force multiplier through signaling on foreign policy issues and as agenda setting agency by compelling and emotional coverage of humanitarian agency crisis and atrocities reordering foreign policy priorities.

India, had adopted the same strategy during the Kargil war of 1999, where media provoked the common people and infused hatred against Pakistan. Modi's belligerence in India and persecution of minorities is refuted by Indian media while they are constantly involved in creating war hysteria against Pakistan and are trying to deteriorate situation in the region. IBN 24/7, India Today, Aj Tak and many others are the main proponents for providing room to negative news reporting. These electronic media channels have adopted an offensive tone and value based jargon, to instigate anti-Pakistan discourse within India and also promote it across the globe. There are numerous Indian channels working in partnership with the international media houses. For instance, the IBN 7 news channel of India is associated with CNN which helps in proliferating negative propaganda against Pakistan. Henceforth, CNN Effect theory is applicable on the Indian media to divert the attention of general masses from the real truth towards its desired agenda.

Media Landscape in India

India has 197 million TV homes, an increased number from 183 million in 2016. It has been observed under BI-2018 survey that the number of individuals with an access to TV has increased to 835 million; a number more than the population of Europe.⁸ Nine hundred approximated private satellite TV channels are on the air and nearly half of them are devoted to news reporting. India has one of the largest broadcasting setup with 200 operational community radio stations, 243 private FM radio stations and 465 million internet subscribers.⁹ India has become a dangerous country for journalists, with an increase in violent assaults on journalists. For example last year at least six journalists were killed in India in the line of their work.¹⁰ These included Shujaat Bukhari, Sandeep

Sharma, Navin Nischal and Vijay Singh, Satyendra Gangwar, Suman Debnath.¹¹ India, for journalists, was the fifth deadliest place according to Reporters without borders. There is a gradual increase in the number of journalists executed so far. At least 63 professional journalists were penalized. Around 348 media persons were detained, sixty (60) were held hostage, while three (3) were missing. Forty Nine (49) out of Eighty (80) were killed by deliberate targeting because their reportage threatened the interests of certain people positioned in religious, economic, political power or organized crime.¹² On the World Press Freedom Index India slipped two ranks (138 from 136), only one rank ahead on Pakistan (139),¹³ especially when they have tall claims regarding “Shinning India” or “India the largest democracy.” Secretary General of RSF Christophe Deloire stated,

Democracy is in great danger if the political debate slides covertly or overtly towards a civil war-style atmosphere, in which journalists are taken and treated as scapegoats....This is a matter of utmost urgency for all the people of good will to halt this cycle of intimidation and fear, who value the freedoms acquired in the history.¹⁴

Meanwhile, on July 3, he wrote to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi telling him about the issuance of the Incident Report in regard to the press freedom in the state and asking him to take immediate measures. This report is issued by the RSF when events are observed, effecting a state’s ranking based on one or more indicators, used in assessing the state’s rank for the RSF Index.¹⁵

How Media should Ideally Behave

The impact of media has been ever more identified, particularly its power to contain or exacerbate possible conflicts.¹⁶ Words like images can also spring provocation. Vaclav Havel, Former Czech President stated that “words can enlighten, uplift, or they can kill.”¹⁷ Media as an instrument of war and peace gave way to the development of the concept of peace journalism. This concept was coined by Johan Galtung. He also anticipated the idea of war journalism as anti-thesis to peace journalism.

War journalism, contrary to peace journalism is propaganda with its major aim of encouraging exclusivist ideologies, promote feelings of “Us vs Them” and marginalize the parties via sensationalized and distorted reporting. Galtung further explicates that the focus of war journalism paradigm is more on violence and it ignores to inspect the structural justifications of a conflict. Whereas, peace journalism brings into limelight news that reduce ethnic and religious skirmishes, promote peace movements. Whereas “peace journalism” highlights news that promote peace movements, reduce religious and ethnic skirmishes, and prevents further conflict and encourages dialogue while creating and promoting an environment for peace.¹⁸

There is a popular perception about Indian Media that it 'discourages to know about others' thinking as a serious desire.¹⁹ As Stephen Cohen said 'this mutual blind advert abridges both populations susceptible to being easily influenced by the unchallenged and limited narrative in the public consciousness about the other.'²⁰ In India abhorrence is seen both as nationalistic and patriotic; while state media upholds national interest by manipulation and playing on people's false acuity of self and the other and their ignorance. According to an associate professor, Rohit Chopra at Santa Carta university, "What they have basically done is they've very quickly kind of mobilized their forces to essentially see if they can actually shape this and hammer it into, kind of, their classic narrative of Hindus versus Muslims. The Muslim as the figure of the outsider, the Congress is a weak party, liberals as, you know, 'anti-national traitors' and so on."²¹

Indian media, in its all manifests; social, electronic, or print media; in the aftermath of Pulwama attack, has been spewing hatred against Pakistan. The Indian nation as a whole has been dragged in war hysteria while adopting prejudiced behaviour towards Kashmiris and war-mongering antagonism in opposition to Pakistan. This has brought diplomatic relations with Pakistan to their lowest ebb.²² Traditionally, the sole channel of bilateral affairs are considered to be the diplomats of a state with their special focus on defending state interests, clarifying positions, convincing states and other actors, issuing threats and ultimatums and stating grievances.²³ However, this communication practice was too slow and highly confidential and formal due to institutional constraints from both sides. The role of the traditional diplomats has evolved along with media's effect on general public opinion. In the contemporary global world, the multiple channels of communication and the media-driven impulse to prompt breaking news has lessened the impact of diplomatic channels of negotiations between two states. Media has often been used as an essential platform, but Indian media largely presents a biased view of the region and of the world.

India's National Security Dilemma; Media Response

India perceives Pakistan as a security threat. While projecting negative sentiments against Pakistan, Indian media is effectively playing its part in nation building by intensifying its state's security dilemma. Indian media, via 'Breaking news, TV programs, letters to newspaper editors and discussions on the radio vigorously reinforce the theory that Pakistan wants India to dismember.'²⁴ The absence of Indian news outlets and correspondence in Pakistan and vice versa specifies that it is the one sided story, public comes across round the globe. Indian masses lives in a virtual information vacuum with little interest in looking at both sides of the picture.

Indian Journalism is Mainly a War Journalism

Indian journalism propagates irrational and unhinged war mongering to facilitate their government's war jingoism. The use of sensational and flashy headlines, provocative texts and more airtime for peace spoilers, not only ensures high ratings but also reinforces the war narrative among the public which is already under influence of history of hostility. The Indian media's urge to promote jingoism at the cost of rationality, is a clear indication that media plays in the hands of radical elements with less or no inclination towards supporting peace initiatives.

Historical Trends and Indian Media Rogation

Kargil Conflict

The Indian media, in the early days of the Kargil war, heaped criticism on its government. Later on, with the progression of the conflict, the initial condemnation was followed by glorification of war via stories of heroism and bravery of the Indian Army. A cover story published by India Today entitled; "*Heroes of Kargil*" praising the Indian Army's sacrifices.²⁵ Barkha Dutt of NDTV stated while conversing with soldiers in a forward bunker that "you should be here to know what they are up to; Further *The Hindu* published the photograph of a soldier listening to the World Cup cricket match commentary between both the rival states to highlight a humane side of the Indian Army. Indian media portrayed by taking cue from state that Pakistan was at fault for occupying Indian territory and violating ceasefire and was a rogue state. "Tracherous," "rogue state" and "terrorist state" were some of the phrases that were used for content framing against Pakistan. By highlighting strategic restraint shown in the face of conflict and going for the non-escalation policy, it aimed at currying international support and favour for the Indian stance. It was evident at the time when Kargil conflict drew closer to an end that Indian media remained effective in highlighting, supporting, and conveying their governments' stance both at home and abroad.²⁶

The Kargil conflict actually exposed the fact about the use of media for diplomatic purposes in war-like situations. The detailed coverage by Indian media of the Kargil war revealed that the media could set certain agendas and impact the perceptions of the public. The twisted reporting of Indian media; from initial criticism on government's actions and then presenting the glory of their army and their actions on the ground, accentuated the manipulative power of Indian media. The Indian narrative dominated the airwaves and earned much support because the international channels including BBC and CNN often used content from thirty two (32) Indian channels.²⁷ The Indian media as a force multiplier and using a single narrative remained successful in creating an image of Pakistan as an aggressor but also as a dangerous and an irresponsible state with nuclear weapons. The event also conveyed that media could

construct and objectify a reality of its own making when a state chose to withhold information in a state of confusion.

However, Indian media failed to communicate the truth to Indian public. "Kargil is unfinished agenda of Simla Agreement"²⁸ This is the fact that Indian media tried to hide from its masses. As per that agreement both the states had to return back those territories they captured during the war and Kargil was the part of Pakistan before 1971 war and was one among those territories. 'The Siachen and the Kargil Heights were on the "Ceasefire Line" of the Pakistan side since 1949 when it was formulated by the UN. Today, they both are on the "Line of Control" of Indian side. What is the use of clever insertion by Mr. Raza then?'²⁹ Preserving Indian control over Kargil was / is a desecration of Simla agreement and India should return these heights to Pakistan. Indian Media manufactured public consent by violating their Right to Know. They presented a fabricated picture to Indian public in order to gain their support for the Kargil operation. Such display of controlled information not only facilitated government but also justified the deaths of hundreds of Indian soldiers in Kargil war.

Agra Summit 2001

The two-day summit was held in Agra from July 14-16, 2001.³⁰ The media coverage of Kargil conflict was a call to arms. The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) commented on the media and public scrutiny of the war in these words ' Perhaps, it was always so in some amount but never as much as is today: wars involve not just armies but entire people. The battle is not only on a given front but is everywhere.'³¹ The coverage during Agra Summit of 2001 was a complete opposite. In case of Agra Summit, Indian media made the mistake of exaggerating expectations and using emotive vocabulary, besides hysterical and embellished reporting on a complex issue. "*They broke the ice, then froze,*" runs the headline in The Indian Express.³² The peace dialogue was not as successful as it could be because everything was under the lens of camera. Live coverage of talks raised the public expectations and pressure to achieve maximum through these talks.

Composite Dialogue 2003-2007

Times of India, being appreciative of the dialogue initiative, time and again emphasized the resolution of the issue of cross-border terrorism. However, it published a few articles that fit the war framework. A few articles published during the initial phase quoted: 'India has clearly stated that if Pakistan stops terrorists' infiltration into Kashmir then the ceasefire can become 'durable'.³³ Further 'Indian Foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal appreciated Pakistan's move towards peace by saying that Dialogue rested on an end to the Islamic insurgents' infiltration to the Indian zone from the Pakistani zone.'³⁴ In

another article it was highlighted that 'India has cautioned Pakistan that militants' shooting by its security forces would be continued if they try to sneak into the territory of India.'³⁵ Another article advocated that Pakistan always ruined negotiations during peace initiatives; 'In 1998 and 1999 new Delhi, along the AGPL, proposed a ceasefire twice before, but it was rejected by Islamabad on the grounds that on the glaciers, India's military presence would then be frozen in place.'³⁶ Accounts of this nature contributed only to add fuel to the fire of mistrust and disputes.

Uri Incident

An Indian Army Brigade Headquarter, On September 18, 2016, came under attack resulting in death of 17 soldiers.³⁷ The media coverage of this incident in India remains a relevant case study of war jingoism. The very next day, *The Times of India* ran a story titled: "Army to turn on heat, asks government to consider cross-border strikes." It was proposed in the report that cross-border attacks are the practical alternative to 'bleed' Pakistani troops without crossing the Line of Control. . The report further stated with no official quotes that "along the 778-kilometers LOC, the Army, is going to turn the heat on Pakistan, with concerted sniping, artillery barrages and other operations, even one of the section of Indian Security establishment wants the government to also take into account 'punitive and limited cross-border strikes to convey an unequivocal message to Pakistan."³⁸

In a stark reminder of CNN effect, on September 20, *The Times of India* declared that war was inevitable.³⁹ *The Times of India*, on its front page ran; "PM clears effective response, army says it's ready and willing to hit back," Times of India further highlighted, "amid rising calls for retribution after an audacious jihadi strike on an Army camp in Uri,"⁴⁰ Another story the *Times News Network* ran, 'Army was ordered by PM Narendra Modi to convey an effective account to Pakistan for the latest terror that it has engineered.'⁴¹

The Indian media, in order to push for a war against Pakistan, developed emotional stories even in the absence of any resistance to support the Indian contentions. The *Indian Express*, on September 20, carried a broad grid, labelled "The Martyrs." The grid's panel carried soldiers' images and names who died in Uri. Under the grid, one of the victims' mother's evocative picture was published.⁴² Another *Indian Express* story titled, "In Bihar, blind father loses his second son" to highlight the calls for revenge from the aggrieved father. Akin stories of victims' family members were published on pages six, seven, and nine to call upon government to "act" and avenge deaths.⁴³ Yashwan Sinha, a leader of ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, published an article

on September 22, under the title “Limits of Restraint” and argued for an appropriate response to Pakistan by military.⁴⁴

Following a similar jingoistic narrative, *Times Now* persistently pressed for war as a routine. Majority of Indian news channels materialized this pattern. *News X* publicized that “*India will punish Pak,*” and “*India [will] diplomatically isolate Pakistan.*” A Zee News report blatantly stated on September 24, Pakistan has selected targets, insinuating that without having any option India had to move now.⁴⁵ Shankar Roychowdhury recommended on NDTV that India should form its own squad of Fighters (fidayeen) to fight against Pakistan. He further said that

‘We must take instant action as Pakistan is doing it again and again.’ Further, ‘Show the world we are serious, stop trade, downgrade relations with Pakistan.’⁴⁶ On September 26, two days after Modi, had uttered his reservations about going to war, during a speech, Dainik Jagran claimed about Indus Water Treaty that India would withdraw from it.⁴⁷ The newspapers were insistent at publishing either an independent agenda or on behalf of government - both cases caused the creation of an unfavorable environment. It appears that some quarters of Indian media are running deliberate propaganda warfare against Pakistan to build acuties on false assumptions while promoting fear and hostility.

For instance, after the strike, large sections of Indian media claimed that Russia had cancelled its joint military exercise with Pakistan in response to a letter from Indian Ministry of External Affairs.⁴⁸ The claim was duly refuted by Government of Pakistan as the joint military exercise was held as scheduled.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, on September 23, after his meeting with Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif, John Kerry- the U.S. Secretary of State, issued a statement that ‘Pakistan and India, through dialogue must resolve their disputes.’ Though supporting Pakistan’s stance on continuity of dialogue, Indian media claimed it as diplomatic success of India. Indian news reports also wrongly speculated the possibility of EU imposing sanctions on Pakistan.⁵⁰

India’s Surgical Strikes 2016

The Indian army, on September 29, 2016, conducted along with the India-Pakistan border a surgical strike. The event was followed by the mainstream Indian media with an assertive nationalistic rhetoric. A surreptitious military operation against terrorism was altered into a political rhetoric intensified by the war jingoism of social media and news channels. On TV news the coverage of strikes was characterized by a convergence of militant nationalistic discourse and imbued classification of specific communities ideologically. The Hindu covered the strikes titling “*Target terror: India strikes across LoC*”.⁵¹ The Indian express highlighted the story on its front page the very

next day of the strike as “*India Strikes*”. They accused Pakistan for supporting the pugnacious attacks across the border. The story entitled in the Indian Express “*Surgical Strikes: Significant Casualties among the terrorists and their Backers, says Indian army*”⁵² directly accused Pakistan of supporting the terrorism. Likewise, The Times of India narrated “*Surgical strikes across LoC: Terrorists no more safe in Pakistan*”.⁵³ The Economic Times elaborated it as “*4 hours, choppers and 38 kills: How India avenged the Uri attack*”.⁵⁴ Such accounts only narrated hate speech that led to the mistrust and disputes among both nations.

Pakistan’s *Express Tribune*, on its front page, said in response, “*Surgical farce blows up in India’s face*,”⁵⁵ with the photographs of a soldiers’ group who were carrying a flag-draped coffin of a Pakistani soldier who, in the strikes, was killed. “*The Nation*” termed the Indian strike as “*self-destructive lunacy*.” In an editorial in Friday it was said: “This attack was carried out for one purpose only, to quench a bloodthirsty constituency that had been baying for war.”⁵⁶ The “*Express Tribune*” claimed the strike “*a dangerous escalation*,” and asked both sides to control the escalation. “If Pakistan is attacked by India it will respond in appropriate measure, but we hope and trust that point will not be reached and that cool heads and steady hands will ultimately prevail,” said further in an “editorial Friday”.⁵⁷

Balakot Strikes 2019

A suicide bomber on February fourteen (14) drove a loaded car with explosives into a convoy of paramilitary personnel in one of the districts of state of Jammu and Kashmir, Pulwama. As per the Indian claims, in the said attack forty four (44) soldiers were dead while around seventy (70) were injured. *The Hindu* claimed that an armed group, *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, took the responsibility for the attack.⁵⁸ On February 26th, the fighter jets of Indian Air Force violated the Line of Control (LoC) and intruded from the Muzaffarabad sector. The same day DG ISPR Maj Gen. Asif Ghafoor stated that “We have already exposed India and will do it again so the world knows what exactly India wants.”⁵⁹

The next day on twenty seven (27) February, across the LoC from Pakistani airspace, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) undertook strikes and in response to this Indian Air Force, once again, crossed the LoC. Two Indian aircraft were shot down by the PAF. One of the aircraft fell inside the Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The IAF Wing Commander Abhinandan was arrested by Pakistani troops on ground. Later he was handed over to India in a gesture of peace on the March 1st, 2019 by the Pakistani PM Imran Khan.⁶⁰ The Indian media adopted the same pattern of response. It tried to provoke general public through echoing war mongering statements. *The Hindu* in its editorial stated “The air

strikes have delivered a clear, robust message; the follow-up must be restrained.”⁶¹ Indian Defence Minister (IDM) Rajnath Singh stated that ‘on terrorism, Balakot airstrikes sent a clear message that across the border the infrastructure could not be allowed to be used by the terrorists.’⁶² In the *Times of India*, it was stated by the IDM that ‘after Balakot, before a misadventure, Pakistan will think 100 times.’⁶³ In the *Times of India*, the Indian Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba stated that ‘these strikes will be compelling to make Pakistan change its behavior.’⁶⁴ In a report by the *Indian Defence Review* the attack was named as ‘the Jihadi Proxy war by Pakistan.’⁶⁵ The Indian media not only contributed to the war jingoism but they escalated the level of hostility between two nuclear neighbours. They encouraged radical Hindu ideology and built the potential response around the Hindutva ideology, which later on supported BJP during the Elections of 2019.

Abrogation of Article 370 and Indian Media’s Response

Pakistan and India went on subsequent wars on Kashmir and each had a territorial claim with a ceasefire line agreement. In the Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (Indian administered side) there has been viciousness for thirty (30) years because of the nationalist insurrection against the Indian rule. In the first week of August, tens of thousands of additional troops have been deployed by India in Kashmir by cancelling a major Hindu pilgrimage, shutting down of colleges and schools and by ordering the tourists to leave. Further, telephone and Internet services were suspended and house arrests on Kashmiri political leaders were imposed. The speculation at this stage was that Article 35A of the Indian constitution, under which the people of the state had a special privilege, would be scrapped. It was stunning for everyone when India revoked nearly all of Article 370, which Article 35A is part of and which had provided the basis of Kashmir’s intricate relationship with India for 70 years.⁶⁶

It was not less than a shock, not only for Kashmiris but for the global community. The Indian media on the other side presented it differently contextualizing its bilateral rivalry while violating the basic human rights. *The Print* narrated the story entitling it as “Modi has clean-bowled Imran Khan with Kashmir Yorker.”⁶⁷ In an article published in the *Indian Express* it was said that ‘In 1992, a crazed mob demolished the Babri Masjid in broad daylight. In 2019, a secretive government abrogated the Article 370 at night. There are some salient similarities occurring 27 years apart between the two events.’⁶⁸ A report published under Observer Research Foundation entitled “Pakistan punched by India’s Article 370 move.”⁶⁹

The Pakistani media presented it as a humanitarian violation by opposing the unjust acts of Indian PM Narendra Modi. The *Dawn* stated that “India revokes occupied

Kashmir's special autonomy through rushed presidential decree.⁷⁰ In an article in *The Express Tribune*, it was stated that the South Asian regional security is at stake due to the rising tensions between the two nuclear states.⁷¹ In *The Express Tribune* another story was published entitled as “Revoking special status: A Kashmiri nightmare come true.” It stated that ‘people of Kashmir are there with a lot of panic and uncertainty. Even the pro-Indian politicians and the former chief ministers have remained with no clue.’⁷² The Pakistani PM termed this move by India as ‘illegal.’⁷³ He said that “India's move will further deteriorate relations between nuclear-capable neighbours,”⁷⁴ Shah Mehmood Qureshi, the foreign minister of Pakistan stated that “India cannot squash Kashmir’s spirit with this repeal bill”.⁷⁵

The abrogation of Article 370 brought immense criticism on Modi’s radical and extremist policies. Hindustan Times, published that ‘the BJP’s government’s radical steps are not the magical pills for the illness of Kashmir, they are assessing it incorrectly.’⁷⁶ The Indian Express reported that the story of democracy in India will be written in betrayal and blood.⁷⁷ The Print narrated that ‘the Modi’s government’s arbitrary and unilateral decisions are undemocratic.’⁷⁸ The First post published “Article 370 and removal of Kashmir's special status: Devil lies in ways which Article 367(4) will now apply to Jammu and Kashmir.”⁷⁹

Kashmir; Diverse Reportage

The Indian media coverage has largely been dominated by war journalism about Kashmir conflict. The Indian media, while setting frames as per socio-political context, patriotism, nationalism and biases, has generally ignored the value of peace journalism. Majority of the Indian media continue to embrace an imprudent type of conflicts’ coverage, with insignificant consideration for sustainable peace. The Indian media legitimize aggression by persistent pessimistic coverage by preferring to highlight violence instead of dispute resolution.

The Indian media was strongly criticized by an RSF report for curbing freedom of expression in Kashmir and highhandedness of Indian Army with journalists. The report specifies that the “Hindu nationalists trying to purge from the national debate all manifestations of ‘anti-national’ thought, in mainstream media self-censorship is mounting.” It also emphasized the efforts to suppress coverage of protests in the valley. “in July 2016, the internet was cut by the military on the first day of a wave of protests in Kashmir and was frequently interrupted thereafter to avert communication between protesters and prevent media and citizen journalists from its coverage.”⁸⁰

With the implicit consent of the central government, the Indian soldiers also targeted the journalists who were working for local media outlets. The case of a martyr’s

daughter Gurmehar Kaur, offers one example. Kaur's post that 'My father was not killed by Pakistan but by war' drew condemnation in India from the hyper nationalist elements, to the extent that she was being called by them as "traitor."⁸¹ The incident reflected an increasing trend of hushing voices of reason which are vital for endorsing peace constituency among the general masses.

Conclusion

Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated once that "CNN is the sixteenth member of the Security Council."⁸² Here CNN refers to media. He said it so because news can make policy at national and international levels. News is information and information is very important for rational choice analysis for decision-making. In contemporary world, information is power and the fast-paced technological developments are integrating information related sectors in a manner, which has made media more powerful than ever before. The impact becomes particularly discernible when the power of media coincides with globalization trends, turning the world into a proverbial global village. In the obtaining environment, it would be appropriate to say that national strategy would be incomplete without the involvement of media where it can be effectively used for realizing domestic as well as foreign policy objectives. "The media are the deliverers of a message, and through their message the audience comprehends and forms opinions on events. This makes the job of mass media more complicated."⁸³

It would be an interesting debate to investigate if Indian media sets government's agenda or Indian government is setting media's agenda. However, this research study indicates that both are inculcating tolerance and acceptance for violence and war among Indian public. Indian public has developed popular perception in favour of aggression towards non-Hindu groups and the neighbouring states. Indian media has constructed an effective narrative of us vs them. The false notion of Hindu supremacy is a popular and election winning promise due to policy hatred adopted by Indian media.

Indian media has built a narrative which complements the agenda of BJP under Modi leadership. They have made war mongering as a political dividend strategy to win the elections. Previous practices and the current situation prevailing in India and the Indian media's role in narrating a discriminatory content against Pakistan and specifically against the Muslim identity have unveiled the true Indian mindset through their policy makers and leaders. Their focus needs to be shifted from building walls to breaking barriers and to bridge the gap in identity politics in order to achieve sustainable peace. International community needs to develop collective code of conduct for journalism in order to promote peace journalism. They need to regulate the hate speech

against any community on ethnic or religious grounds. This will help building an inclusive international community where hatred for others is not the foundation of nationalism. The behavior of the Indian media as conflict multiplier is dangerous for the peace between two nuclear states. In such volatile nuclear environment, ideally the Indian media should mitigate tensions and act as peace diplomats rather than war frenzy fundamentalists.

The freedom of speech has been compromised in India. India lies on 142 number in international freedom of press index. The highspeed internet is banned in Indian Occupied Kashmir for last several months.⁸⁴ Despite the efforts of Indian government to silence the free journalism and curtail the free speech, three Indian journalists have won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for the year 2020 for their photography of Indian atrocities in IoK. However, popular perception in India considers them as “anti-national.” This is how the conflict journalism by Indian media has deeply affected the rationality and moral values of Indian public. They are happily living in the bubble of disinformation/false information in which Modi government has pushed them with the help of modern Indian media, whether it is electronic, print or social.

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